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Values and Politics

When David Miliband launched his bid to become the next leader of the Labour Party he said “I believe we need a market economy but not a market society. There are values beyond markets that it is our duty to nurture: justice, compassion, sustainability.”

Explaining his reasons for standing in the same contest David’s brother Ed said “I am standing for leader of the Labour Party to stand up for our values as the front and centre of everything we do. I am standing for leader because we shouldn’t believe those who say: the choice is either values, or victory.”

There’s a lot of it about at the moment – politics and values talk.

In his first address to the television cameras on the steps of No 10 Downing Street new Prime Minister David Cameron said of his government that it “is built on some clear values. Values of freedom, values of fairness, and values of responsibility“. The next day at a press conference with Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg in the Rose Garden of No 10 he said “It will be an administration united behind three key principles: freedom, fairness and responsibility“. By the time we got to the Queens Speech at the state opening of parliament freedom, fairness and responsibility had become the “core values” of the government.

Let’s leave aside the confusion over what’s a value and what’s a principle for the moment – there’s a bigger problem here.

When leaders in politics or organisations make sweeping statements about values or just use the name of the idea – like “fairness” – we can’t be sure what they actually mean. So we make assumptions based on what we know and think from our own experience. We develop our own sense of what fairness is and expect that

the decisions and actions that are then made by the leaders will fit those assumptions.

When this works and our idea turns out to be in alignment with what the leaders do and say it's great: everyone is happy. Unfortunately this rarely lasts for very long. When it goes wrong, it tends to go dramatically wrong and we can feel not merely disappointed but angry and betrayed. Imagine a civil servant might ask how is it fair to attack our terms and conditions – a school that has been waiting for a capital programme may ask how is it fair that after so long now we are not allowed to build – an unemployed young person may ask how is it fair to scrap a job creation scheme just as I become eligible for it?

It may very well be that in a bigger picture there is a “fairness” case to be made, we can't know because what fairness means in their language has not been made plain.

The point of this illustration is simply to say if you are part of any form of collective that wants to consciously live its values make sure you know what they mean and you explain it to everyone upon whom it may impact.

Getting Value from Values

A really interesting short piece from Prof Rosabeth Ross Kanter of Harvard Business School published in June asserts that there are ten essential ingredients to getting the most out of core values in any organization. Alongside values being walked and talked by the leadership another key element is the importance “codifying” the value which involves explaining what it means so that people can talk about it. Link to her article here

<http://blogs.hbr.org/kanter/2010/06/ten-essentials-for-getting-val.html>

Volunteers Requested

From this September the insightful power of the AVI – A Values Inventory – will be more widely available in the UK.

Magma Effect has been developing a range of stand alone values reports which will be available to purchase from our website. There will be:

- The Essential AVI Pilot which takes a snap shot view of the Top Five priorities and key Focus and Foundation values priced at £50
- The Managers AVI Pilot which looks at the Top Seven and a complete Focus values listing priced at £90
- The Executive AVI Navigator which looks at the Top Nine, a complete Vision values listing and World View priced at £150

All prices include VAT.

The volunteering opportunity is to be a guinea pig for one of these reports. Final touches to the formats and content are being completed over the next two weeks and we are keen for some people to try out the reports and tell us what they think. If you would have an interest in putting a report to the test and would have the time to provide us with a few lines of feedback then please let us know on info@magmaeffect.com.

Meanwhile our best wishes for a rejuvenating summer.

Jackie

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Magma Effect

.....creating insight for meaning and motivation.....